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No. 16

**THE CASE FOR  
WEST-INDIAN  
SELF GOVERNMENT**

C. L. R. JAMES



THE HOGARTH PRESS

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# THE CASE FOR WEST-INDIAN SELF GOVERNMENT

C. L. R. JAMES



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TO

CAPTAIN ARTHUR A. CIPRIANI, of Trinidad

T. A. MARRYSHOW, of Grenada

J. ELMORE EDWARDS, of Grenada

C. D. RAWLE, of Dominica

LEADERS OF THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT IN THE  
WEST INDIES

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# I

## THE ENGLISH IN THE WEST INDIES

A COLONIAL OFFICE Commission is now taking evidence in Trinidad, the Windward and the Leeward Islands, with a view to the federation of all or some of them. But in these islands to-day political unrest is widespread and deep, and Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, has consented to the request of a deputation that the Commission be allowed to take evidence on the constitutional question. Yet the merits and demerits of constitutions cannot be fairly adjudged without a thorough understanding of the social constituencies they serve. First, then, to give some account of the people who live in the West Indies—in the West Indies, for though the scope of the present Commission is restricted, yet British Guiana (for administrative purposes always considered a part of the West Indies) and Jamaica are closely watching, and the decision of the Colonial Office will powerfully affect opinion and action in these colonies.

The bulk of the population of these West Indian Islands, over 80 per cent., consists of Negroes or persons of Negroid origin. They are the descendants of those African slaves who were brought almost continuously to the West Indies until the slave trade was stopped in 1807. Cut off from all contact with Africa for a century and a quarter, they present to-day the extraordinary spectacle of a people who, in language and social customs, religion, education and outlook, are essentially Western and, indeed, far more

advanced in Western culture than many a European community.

The advocates of Colonial Office trusteeship would have you believe that the average Negro is a savage fellow, bearing beneath the veneer of civilisation and his black skin, viciousness and criminality which he is losing but slowly, and which only the virtual domination of the European is able to keep in check. Says Lord Olivier<sup>1</sup> :

"In the matter of natural good manners and civil disposition the Black People of Jamaica are very far, and, indeed, out of comparison, superior to the members of the corresponding class in England, America or North Germany."

Of their alleged savagery :

"This viciousness and criminality are, in fact, largely invented, imputed and exaggerated in order to support and justify the propaganda of race exclusiveness."

The trustees would have you believe that even when he is not a savage the average Negro is a simple, that is to say, a rather childish fellow. Compare this with Lord Olivier's opinion (among those of a hundred others), that :

"The African races generally have a subtle dialectical faculty, and are in some ways far quicker in apprehension than the average Caucasian. . . .

"The African, whether at home or *even in exile after the great hiatus of slavery*,<sup>2</sup> shows practical shrewdness and aptitude for the affairs of local government. His legal acumen is higher than that of the European."

The last argument of the trustees, even when they have to admit the attainments of the Negro, is that he does not produce sufficient men of the calibre necessary for administering his own affairs. Yet Sir Charles Bruce,<sup>3</sup> after his wide experience could say :

<sup>1</sup> Lord Olivier : Secretary of the Royal W.I. Commission of 1899 ; Governor of Jamaica (1907-13) ; Chief Commissioner, W.I. Sugar Commission, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Italics my own.

<sup>3</sup> Served in many Colonies, including the Windward Islands ; at one time Governor of British Guiana.

— — —  
“ In the meantime, such has been the energy and capacity of the Afro-European population in the Crown Colonies, where they form the bulk of the general community, that there is no department of Government, executive, administrative, or judicial, in which they have not held the highest office with distinction, no profession of which they are not honoured members, no branch of commerce or industry in which they have not succeeded.”

To-day and at any time during the last forty years such posts as Chief Justice, Colonial Secretary, Puisne Judge, Attorney-General, Solicitor-General and Surgeon-General could be filled two or three times over by local men, most of them men of colour. The Civil Services are over 90 per cent. coloured, and even in large-scale business, the white man's jealous preserve, numerous coloured men occupy high and important positions.

It has to be admitted that the West Indian Negro is ungracious enough to be far from perfect. He lives in the tropics, and he has the particular vices of all who live there, not excluding people of European blood. In one respect, indeed, the Negro in the tropics has an overwhelming superiority to all other races—the magnificent vitality with which he overcomes the enervating influences of the climate. But otherwise the West Indian people are an easy-going people. Their life is not such as to breed in them the thrift, the care, and the almost equine docility to system and regulation which is characteristic of the industrialised European. If their comparative youth as a people saves them from the cramping effects of tradition, a useful handicap to be rid of in the swiftly-changing world of to-day, yet they lack that valuable basis of education which is not so much taught or studied as breathed in from birth in countries where people have for generation after generation lived settled and orderly lives. Quicker in intellect and spirit than the English, they pay for it by being less continent, less stable, less dependable. And this particular aspect of their character is intensified by certain social prejudices peculiar to the West Indies, and which



have never been given their full value by those observers from abroad who have devoted themselves to the problems of West Indian society and politics.

The Negroid population of the West Indies is composed of a large percentage of actually black people, and about fifteen or twenty per cent. of people who are a varying combination of white and black. From the days of slavery, these have always claimed superiority to the ordinary black, and a substantial majority of them still do so (though resenting as bitterly as the black assumptions of white superiority). With emancipation in 1834 the blacks themselves established a middle class. But between the brown-skinned middle class and the black there is a continual rivalry, distrust and ill-feeling, which, skilfully played upon by the European people, poisons the life of the community. Where so many crosses and colours meet and mingle, the shades are naturally difficult to determine and the resulting confusion is immense. There are the nearly-white hanging on tooth and nail to the fringes of white society, and these, as is easy to understand, hate contact with the darker skin far more than some of the broader-minded whites. Then there are the browns, intermediates, who cannot by any stretch of imagination pass as white, but who will not go one inch towards mixing with people darker than themselves. And so on, and on, and on. Associations are formed of brown people who will not admit into their number those too much darker than themselves, and there have been heated arguments in committee as to whether such and such a person's skin was fair enough to allow him or her to be admitted, without lowering the tone of the institution. Clubs have been known to accept the daughter and mother, who were fair, but to refuse the father, who was black. A dark-skinned brother in a fair-skinned family is sometimes the subject of jeers and insults and open intimations that his presence is not required at the family social functions. Fair-skinned girls who marry dark men are often ostracised by their families and given up as lost. There have been cases of fair

women who have been content to live with black men but would not marry them. Should the darker man, however, have money or position of some kind, he may aspire, and it is not too much to say that in a West Indian colony the surest sign of a man's having arrived is the fact that he keeps company with people lighter in complexion than himself. Remember, finally, that the people most affected by this are people of the middle class who, lacking the hard contact with realities of the masses and unable to attain to the freedoms of a leisured class, are more than all types of people given to trivial divisions and subdivisions of social rank and precedence.

Here lies, perhaps, the gravest drawback of the coloured population. They find it difficult to combine, for it is the class that should in the natural course of things supply the leaders that is so rent and torn by these colour distinctions.

For historic and economic reasons, the most important of the other native groups are the white creoles.<sup>1</sup> The white creole suffers from two disadvantages, one of which he understands, and the other of which he probably does not. The first is climate. It seems that the European blood cannot by itself stand the climate for more than two or three generations. Here and there the third and fourth generation may use wealth, early acquired, to bolster mediocre abilities into some sort of importance, but the West Indies, as the generations succeed each other, take a deadly toll of all those families from temperate climates which make their home permanently there.

The second disability of the white creole is less tangible but equally important. He finds himself born in a country where the mere fact of his being white, or at least of skin fair enough to pass as white, makes him a person of consequence. Whatever he does, wherever he finds himself, he

<sup>1</sup> Many of the West Indian Islands are cosmopolitan, and East Indians form about twelve per cent. of the total population, though concentrated in Trinidad. But there is no need to give them special treatment, for economically and educationally they are superior to the corresponding class in India; and get on admirably with the Negroes.

is certain of recognition. But with this power goes nothing beside personal responsibility. Englishmen govern the country. The result is an atmosphere which cramps effort. There is not that urgent necessity for exceptional performance which drives on the coloured man of ambition, and the white creole suffers accordingly. But this is not a disease which is easily seen by those who suffer from it, nor is the disease, even when diagnosed, one for which the patient is likely to take the remedy.

Into this community comes the Englishman to govern, fortified (sometimes) by university degrees; and of late years by a wide experience in dealing with primitive peoples in Africa.

His antecedents have not been helpful. Bourgeois at home, he has found himself after a few weeks at sea suddenly exalted into membership of a ruling class. Empire to him and most of his type, formerly but a word, becomes on his advent to the colonies a phrase charged with responsibilities, but bearing in its train the most delightful privileges, beneficial to his material well-being and flattering to his pride. Being an Englishman and accustomed to think well of himself, in this new position he soon develops a powerful conviction of his own importance in the scheme of things and it does not take him long to convince himself not only that he can do his work well—which to do him justice, he quite often does—but that for many generations to come none but he and his type can ever hope to do the work they are doing.

On his arrival in the West Indies he experiences a shock. Here is a thoroughly civilised community, wearing the same clothes that he does, speaking no other language but his own, with its best men as good as, and only too often, better than himself. What is the effect on the colonial Englishman when he recognises, as he has to recognise, the quality of those over whom he is placed in authority? Men have to justify themselves, and he falls heavily back on the "ability of the Anglo-Saxon to govern," "the trusteeship of the mother country until such time" (always

in the distant future) "as these colonies can stand by themselves," etc., etc. He owes his place to a system, and the system thereby becomes sacred. Blackstone did not worship the corrupt pre-Reform constitution as the Colonial Office official worships the system of Crown Colony Government.

"Patriotism," says Johnson, "is the last refuge of a scoundrel." It is the first resort of the colonial Englishman. How he leaps to attention at the first bars of "God Save the King"! Empire Day, King's Birthday, days not so much neglected in England as ignored, give to his thirsty spirit an opportunity to sing the praises of the British Empire and of England, his own country, as its centre. Never does he seem to remember that the native place of the majority of those to whom he addresses his wearisome panegyrics is not England, but the colony in which they were born, in which they live, and in which they will in all probability die.

This excessive and vocal patriotism in the colonial Englishman is but the natural smoke of intensified fires burning within. That snobbishness which is so marked a characteristic of the Englishman at home, in the colonies develops into a morbid desire for the respect and homage of those over whom he rules. Uneasily conscious of the moral insecurity of his position, he is further handicapped by finding himself an aristocrat without having been trained as one. His nose for what he considers derogatory to his dignity becomes keener than a bloodhound's, which leads him into the most frightful solecisms.

In Grenada in 1931 there was a very orderly demonstration by all classes of the community against a decision of the Governor. One man who with his family had been invited to Government House for some social function took part in it. The Governor cancelled the invitation, but informed him that the cancellation did not apply to his wife and daughter who could come if they wanted to.

It is not surprising that the famous English tolerance leaves him almost entirely. At home he was distinguished

for the liberality and freedom of his views. Hampden, Chatham, Dunning and Fox, Magna Carta and Bill of Rights, these are the persons and things (however misconceived) which Englishmen, undemonstrative as they are, write and speak of with a subdued but conscious pride. It is no accident, the Whig tradition in English historical writing. But in the colonies any man who speaks for his country, any man who dares to question the authority of those who rule over him, any man who tries to do for his own people what Englishmen are so proud that other Englishmen have done for theirs, immediately becomes in the eyes of the colonial Englishman a dangerous person, a wild revolutionary, a man with no respect for law and order, a self-seeker actuated by the lowest motives, a reptile to be crushed at the first opportunity. What at home is the greatest virtue becomes in the colonies the greatest crime.

The colonial Englishman it is fair to say retains some of the admirable characteristics which distinguish his race at home, but he is in a false position. Each succeeding year sees local men pressing him on every side, men whom he knows are under no illusions as to why he holds the places he does. Pressure reduces him to dodging and shifting. Thus it is that even of that honesty which is so well-recognised a characteristic of the English people,—but I shall let an Englishman speak: “It is difficult,” says Mr. Somervell, the historian, “for white races to preserve their moral standards in their dealings with races they regard as inferior.” Should Englishmen of fine sensibility stray into the Colonial Service they find themselves drawn inevitably into the circle of their colleagues and soon discover that for them to do otherwise than the Romans would be equivalent to joining a body of outsiders against their own. Thus it is that in the colonies, to quote an English official in the West Indies, “such large and intelligent classes of Englishmen come to have opinions so different from those for which the nation has ever been renowned at home.”

## II

### THE GOVERNOR-IN-EXECUTIVE-COUNCIL

In a Crown Colony Government all final decisions whatsoever rest with the Governor. To advise him he has an Executive Council consisting usually of his most important officials and one or two of the local population selected by himself. (But he can, if he wishes, act against even the unanimous advice of this Council.) Let us see a Governor and Executive Council at work to-day.

Just over thirty years ago the Government of Trinidad granted to a Canadian Company (registered locally as the Trinidad Electric Company) an exclusive monopoly for thirty years to generate and sell electric light and power and to conduct a tramway service within the city of Port-of-Spain. Neither to the Government nor to the Corporation did the Company pay anything for this privilege. In 1928, however, the City Council of Port-of-Spain began to discuss the position with the undisguised intention of ultimately acquiring the undertaking should the idea prove feasible. When approached by the City Council, Sir Horace Byatt, Governor, and Mr. Wilfred Jackson, Colonial Secretary, were sympathetic and decided on independent expert investigation. In March 1929 the Government recommended the services of Mr. Evan Parry as expert. Mr. Evan Parry, the Government stated, was a partner of the firm of Messrs. Preece, Cardew and Rider, and was due in Trinidad in November to give the Government advice on wireless questions. Inasmuch, however, as circumstances had caused the Government to require a

wireless inspector at a much earlier date, the Government no longer needed Mr. Parry's services and the City Council could have him if it paid his expenses. The City Council agreed to have Mr. Parry.

Mr. Parry arrived at the end of November, 1929, but meanwhile Sir Horace Byatt and Mr. Wilfred Jackson had gone their ways, Sir Claud Hollis and Mr. S. M. Grier taking their places. The Government appointed a committee consisting of the Attorney-General in the chair, the Government Director of Public Works, the Government Wireless Engineer, Captain Cipriani (the Mayor of Port-of-Spain and a member of the Legislative Council) and the Hon. Gaston Johnston, K.C. (five times Mayor of the City and also a member of the Legislative Council). A few weeks later the Government suggested that as the Company showed great unwillingness to give information the services of Mr. Harding should be secured, Mr. Harding having been until quite recently and for over twenty years manager of the Electric Company. The City Council agreed. The Government suggested that the City Council should pay Mr. Harding a retaining fee of a thousand dollars. To this also the City Council agreed.

The committee and Mr. Parry both reported that to take over the undertaking would prove profitable and that the Municipality should do so in preference to the Government.

About this time the President of the Trinidad Electric Company accompanied by Counsel came to Trinidad and soon after his arrival the Company made proposals to the Government limiting its earnings and providing for taxation. The Governor invited the Council to discuss the position.

Captain Cipriani, the Mayor, has since stated in public correspondence with the Government that before the Company communicated these proposals to the Government, Mr. S. M. Grier, the Colonial Secretary, had met the representatives of the Company at the Queen's Park Hotel, had assured them that if the Company made con-

cessions he would win over the reasonable members of the City Council, and that the Government would sympathetically consider the extension of the franchise. Knowing what he knew, therefore, Captain Cipriani told the Governor that the City Council would not be a party to any three-cornered meeting. He said that the City Council wished to take over and the Government had encouraged it. To accept terms now would only mean the same situation arising before long. A few days after, the Colonial Secretary informed the City Council that the Government would not guarantee a loan for the purpose of the Council's acquiring, until a full investigation had shown that such acquisition would be in the public interest.

This talk of full investigation coming after the reports of the government committee and Mr. Parry stiffened the City Council and the Mayor issued a manifesto to the citizens. However, another deputation from the Council met the Governor again on June 17th. The Governor gave some figures (most of them supplied by the Company) in which he proved that it would be unprofitable for the City Council to take over. These figures included half a million dollars under the heading "cost of acquisition." The City Council decided to put the case before the Secretary of State for the Colonies; and a delegation was sent to England, the Company meanwhile taking the matter to the Courts. The delegation was met by Mr. Drummond Shiels, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, accompanied by Mr. Darnley, an official of the Colonial Office. During the discussion the delegation had to reply to three points. One was that there was a large excess of expenditure over revenue in the 1930 estimates of Port-of-Spain (which estimates had been approved by the Governor-in-Executive-Council without criticism or comment); another, that it was improper to get evidence from Mr. Harding (who had been recommended to the City Council by the Government); and thirdly, that the Government placed little value on the report of Mr.



Parry (who also had been recommended to the City Council by the Government).

The implication that the financial position of the City Council was unsound irritated the delegation extremely, and it undertook to prove the reverse to Mr. Darnley, which it easily did. When the delegation again met Mr. Drummond Shiels, however, it was mystified to hear that he had since been informed that the City Council's financial position was sound. After the return of the delegation the City Council received a letter from the Colonial Secretary stating that in the event of the Company losing its appeal to the Privy Council the Government would offer no obstacle to the City Council's acquiring. The Company had claimed that by the ordinance it was entitled to its privileges in perpetuity. On January 4th, 1931, every claim of the Company was dismissed with costs. The Company appealed to the Privy Council.

The Government passed an ordinance, extending the franchise of the Company indefinitely, the Company meanwhile to enjoy all the profits. In conference, a City Councillor suggested protective legislation. Government delegates howled him down. In the Legislative Council debate Mr. Gaston Johnston argued strenuously that a clause should be inserted maintaining the *status quo*. The Government refused.

The Company had given its word, it said.

Some months after, in June 1932, a new company, the Electric Ice Company, submitted to the City Council plans for the building of an ice factory on lands formerly held by the Trinidad Electric Company. The manager of the Trinidad Electric Company is the manager of the Electric Ice Company. The secretary of the Trinidad Electric Company is a director of the Electric Ice Company. The City Council interviewed the Governor, who, after consideration, stated that he did not propose to take any steps in the matter. Members of the Legislative Council wished to introduce legislation bringing the temporary extension to an end. The Government said that it would

use its official majority to defeat any such measure. Fortunately the matter has been solved by a complete victory for the City Council on the appeal to the Privy Council.

The above is the story in outline only. The Government, advance-guard for the Company, step by step tried to defeat the legitimate aspirations of the citizens of Port-of-Spain ; and further details would show more clearly the meanness, the hostility and the vindictiveness with which it pursued this aim.

### III

#### THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE deliberations of an Executive Council are secret. The body in which public interest centres is the advisory Legislative Council, which undoubtedly wields great influence, if not power. The Legislative Council of Trinidad is typical and will best serve as an example. This Council consists of three sections. The first is that of the official members, twelve in number, chosen by the Governor from among the various heads of departments. The second consists of the unofficial members, thirteen in number, partly nominated and partly elected. The third section is not the least important of the three—the Governor, who is in the Chair. It will be seen how potent for misgovernment is each of these three sections.

The official section, composed mainly of heads of departments, comprises a solid block of Englishmen with a few white creoles, generally from some other colony. These officials are for the most part strangers to the community which they govern; in Trinidad there have been five Attorney-Generals during the last dozen years. Their position is secure, and their promotion depends not on the people over whom they rule, but on a Colonial Office thousands of miles away. It is not difficult to imagine their bureaucratic attitude. There have been official members of the Trinidad Legislature who over a period of years have sat in the Council, saying nothing, doing nothing, wasting their own time and the time of the public. There is a further unreality, because whenever the

Governor wishes he can instruct the officials all to vote in the same way. And the Council becomes farcical when two members of a committee appointed by the Governor receive instructions to vote against their own recommendations. Here to-day and gone to-morrow, these heads of departments, in clubs and social gatherings mix chiefly with the wealthy white creoles, whose interests lie with the maintenance of all the authority and privileges of the officials against the political advancement of the coloured people. Their sons and daughters intermarry with the white creoles and get employment in the big business houses. From all this springs that alliance so clearly foreshadowed by Cornwall Lewis. "We represent large interests," said the Attorney-General in a recent debate, and every West Indian knows the interests which he and the other officials represent. The local Government is the Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber of Commerce is the local Government.

The unofficial members "representing the people" form the second group, and since 1925 they have consisted of six members nominated by the Governor and seven members elected by the people. Formerly the Governor nearly always appointed white men representing business interests. He might as well have appointed a few more heads of departments for all the representation the people got from them.

But it has been the policy of the Government for some years past to appoint a few Negroes to these positions. These have usually been Negroes of fair, and not of dark skin. And that type of man, whether on the Council or in the other departments of government, is often a more dangerous opponent of the masses of the people than the Europeans themselves.

In its broader aspect this is no new thing in politics. There is, first of all, the natural gravitation of all men towards the sources of power and authority, and, on far larger stages, parties of privilege have not yet ceased to hire mercenaries to do what would be less plausibly and

effectively done by themselves. The West Indian Islands are small and the two easiest avenues of success are the help of the Government or the help of the white people. It is, therefore, fatally easy for the nominee to rationalise his self-seeking by the reflection that after all, in such a Legislature, he can achieve nothing that the Government sets its mind against.

‘There is yet another consideration no less powerful than the foregoing. These West Indian colonies offer especially to those no longer young, little in the way of organised amusement, and individuals are thrown back almost entirely on society for recreation. Mr. Julian Huxley, after four months’ extensive travel in Africa, has written :

“ Of a large and important section of white people in Africa, officials as well as settlers, it is not unfair to say that *The Tallor*, *Punch*, a few magazines, detective stories and second-rate romantic novels represent their intellectual and cultural level.”

The case in Trinidad is precisely the same, and indeed the shallowness, the self-sufficiency and the provincialism of English colonial society has long been a by-word among cultivated persons. But it keeps itself to itself and thereby becomes exclusive. It is the wealthiest class, lives in the best houses, has the best clubs, organises the best amusements. For the fair-skinned Negro who does not seek much, that society seems a paradise.

But when that is said, though much is said, all is not said. There is first of all the Governor. There have been recent Governors whom the people despised, and rightly. Of one and his entourage it could be said that he represented the butler, his wife the housekeeper, and his A.D.C. the groom. But His Majesty’s Representative is sometimes a man of parts, his wife a person of elegance. And whatever qualities they may have are naturally enhanced by the

“ . . . power  
Pre-eminence, and all the large effects  
That troop with majesty.”

Now and then among the officials one finds a really brilliant man. Of late, members of the Consular Body, and some of the Professors of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, have contributed their fair share to local society. Distinguished visitors often lend both tone and colour to the social dullness of local life. Any unusual social talent of local origin, if it is white, will usually find its way to the top. Thus around the Governor centre a few small groups which, though they will vary in value from time to time, yet whatever they are, are by far the best that the islands can show, for the coloured people, though possessing in themselves the elements of a society of some cultural value (their range of choice being so much wider), are so divided among themselves on questions of colour, based on varying shades of lightness or darkness, that they have been unable to form any truly representative social group or groups. The result is that many a man conscious of powers above the average, and feeling himself entitled to move in the best society the island affords, spends most of his leisure time and a small fortune in trying to get as near to the magic centre as possible, in itself a not too mean nor too contemptible ambition. The serious flaw in the position of the local man of colour is this, that those to whose society and good graces he aspires are not only Englishmen, but Englishmen in the colonies, and therefore constitutionally incapable of admitting into their society on equal terms persons of colour, however gifted or however highly placed (unless very rich). The aspirant usually achieves only a part of his aim. The utmost sacrifice of money, influence, and dignity usually gains him but a precarious position on the outer fringes of the society which he hopes to penetrate, and he is reduced to consorting with those fairer than himself, whose cupidity is greater than their pride. Others who feel themselves above this place-at-any-price policy stand on their dignity and remain at home, splendidly isolated. Thus it is nothing surprising to find on the Legislative Council three or four coloured men, each a

little different in colour, who are more widely separated from one another than any of them is from a white man, and whose sole bond of unity is their mutual jealousy in their efforts to stand well with the governing officials.

These matters would not concern us here except for their unfortunate reaction on the political life of the community.

Not only nominations to the Council but all appointments in the service are made by the Government, and the Government can, and usually does, point to the number of coloured men it has appointed. But either by accident or design it rarely appoints black men. The appointment of these fair-skinned men seems to depend to a large extent on the way, whether openly or covertly, they dissociate themselves from their own people. But those same arts a place did gain must it maintain. The result is that a more or less intelligent and aspiring minority occupy a position in which they do more harm than good, for to the Colonial Office and the ordinary observer, being men of colour, they represent the coloured people, while the Government and the white creole know that when it comes to a crisis these, their henchmen, are more royalist than the King. Some people have endeavoured to see in this a characteristic weakness of the coloured people and a grave reflection on their capacity for leadership. It is not so. Disinterested service actuated by nothing more than a sense of responsibility to one's own best convictions is a thing rare among all nations, and by necessity of less frequent occurrence in a small community of limited opportunities. These men are not so much inherently weak as products of the social system in which they live. Still, whatever the cause of their conduct, its effect is disastrous. Particularly as the Government will appoint a dark Negro to a position of importance only when it cannot get a fair one. In this way it builds up in the service a group of men who, however distasteful to Englishmen themselves, are at one with them in their common antipathy to the black. Despising black men,

these intermediates, in the Legislative Council and out of it, are forever climbing up the climbing wave, governed by one dominating motive—acceptance by white society. It would be unseemly to lower the tone of this book by detailing with whom, when and how Colonial Secretaries and Attorney-Generals distribute the nod distant, the bow cordial, the shakehand friendly, or the cut direct as may seem fitting to their exalted Highnesses; the transports of joy into which men, rich, powerful, and able, are thrown by a few words from the Colonial Secretary's wife or a smile from the Chief Justice's daughter. But political independence and social aspiration cannot run between the same shafts; sycophancy soon learns to call itself moderation; and invitations to dinner or visions of a knighthood form the strongest barriers to the wishes of the people.

All this is, and has been, common knowledge in the West Indies for many years. The situation shows little signs of changing. The type of constitution encourages rather than suppresses the tendency. But the day that all fair-skinned Negroes realise (as some do to-day) that they can only command respect when they respect themselves, that day the domination of the coloured people by white men is over. If the white men are wealthy, they will have the influence of wealthy men. If they are able they will have the influence of able men. But they will cease to have the influence of wealth or ability, not because they are wealthy or able, but simply because they are white.

If we neglect the elected members for the time being (a form of attention to which they are well accustomed) there remains now only the Governor in the Chair.

At first sight it may seem that the Governor in the Chair occupies a merely formal position, but on closer observation it becomes immediately obvious that his position there is as mischievous as those of the other two sections of a Crown Colony Legislature. The Governor of a Crown Colony is three things. He is the representative of His Majesty the King, and as such must have all the homage and respect customary to that position. But the Governor



is also the officer responsible for the proper administration of the government. The Governor-General of South Africa, like the other Governors-General, is not responsible for the government of the country. The responsible persons are the Prime Ministers of those countries. In Trinidad the Governor is Governor-General and Prime Minister in one. But that makes only two. When the Governor sits in the Legislative Council he is Chairman of that body. The unfortunate result is that when a member of the Council rises to speak he is addressing at one and the same time an incomprehensible personage, three in one and one in three. A Member of the House of Commons can pay all due respect to His Majesty the King, submit himself to the proper authority of the Speaker of the House, and yet express himself in uncompromising terms about any aspect of government policy which appears to him to deserve such censure. In a Crown Colony Legislature that is impossible. The Governor, being responsible for the administration, is liable to criticism directed against his subordinates. It is natural that he should, it is inconceivable that he would do otherwise than, defend those who assist him in carrying on the affairs of the Colony. But should a Governor make an inconvenient admission as the head of the Government he immediately assumes one of his other alibis. And in the Council as it is constituted and with the Governor holding the power that he holds, there are never lacking members always on the alert to jump to the defence of the dignity of His Majesty's representative or the respect due to the President of the Chamber, quite neglectful of the responsibility of the head of the administration. In December 1931 one nominated member in the course of his address on a Divorce Bill referred to the part the Governor had played in bringing forward that piece of legislation so unpopular with a certain section.

"It is a pity that Your Excellency did not publish these despatches earlier, so that the public might have known the part Your Excellency has played in respect to this matter. I

have no doubt that now the despatches have been published and the atmosphere has been clarified, it will be realised that Your Excellency's share of the responsibility for the presentation of this Bill is absolutely nil.

"If I may say so without offence, it would appear that you are regarded by the Colonial Office merely as a servant of the centurion. . . . It must be very humiliating indeed to any responsible officer to find himself in the position in which Your Excellency must find yourself. . . ."

Now that speech erred, if it erred in any way, on the side of temperance. The speaker was forcible, but, nominated brown-skinned Negro in a Crown Colony Legislature, his tone was so respectful as to be almost humble.<sup>1</sup> But not so in the eyes of one member. No. For him the Governor had been insulted. Nor did he wait for a government official to say so. He (himself a brown-skinned Negro) began his own address with a flood of compliment to the Solicitor-General (a white man) for the able way in which he had argued for the Bill and then turned his hose on the Attorney-General (another white man) and complimented him on the able way he had argued against the Bill. Then he switched off to the address of his brother Negro and nominated member.

"He referred to the Governor of this Colony in a way ill befitting any member of this Council. . . ."

Nor was he yet satisfied that enough sacrifices had been offered on the altar of the Governor's dignity. Before his speech was finished he found opportunity to make another salaam.

"I was pained to listen to his statement in almost flippant language that the Governor of this Colony was the servant of the centurion. . . ."

Instances may be multiplied. In his triple position the Governor in the chair exercises a disproportionate influence. His presence is a constant check to free expression of opinion. And a Legislative Council in which a man can-

<sup>1</sup> Alas! It did not save him. He has been omitted from the new nominations.

not freely speak his mind is a place fit for academic debates and not for the discussion of the affairs of government.

It is not difficult to imagine the result of all this in the working of the constitution. The Government, already so overwhelmingly strong, is without effective criticism or check, and being composed of men who are governing not for the sake of governing, but because they have to make a living, it is not strange that it should be as slack and regardless as it usually is. "Public life is a situation of power and energy. He trespasses upon his duty who sleeps upon his watch, and may as well go over to the enemy." There, Burke, as ever, master of political statement, distils for the politician a first principle.

It is the lack of this active vigilance which robs our politics of any reality. Far from being alert guardians of the public weal, the favourite formula of most of these members is: "I beg to congratulate the Government." Should an official make a speech of no more than mediocre ability, each one, at some time in his own speech, "begs to congratulate the honourable member." Always they seem to be bowing obsequiously, hat in hand, always the oily flattery, the ingratiating smile, and criticism offered on a silver salver. A person gaining his first impression of politics from a reading of some of these debates would conclude not that it was the sole business of the Government to govern properly, but a favour that was being conferred upon the people. It must not be imagined that some of these members have been ciphers of no value on the Legislature. Sometimes they possess great ability or force of personality. They are men of the world enough to know that if to assert themselves too much is a mistake, it would be equally a mistake to assert themselves too little. But they can never have that full weight in public matters which comes from a man like Captain Cipriani, who speaks from his well-known and settled convictions, or from a respected Colonial Secretary who is stating the case from the Government point of view. Sometimes they find

themselves inadvertently on the wrong side, and it is interesting to see them wriggle out. "Can the Government see its way to . . . ?" "No." "Couldn't the Government . . . ?" "No. . . ." "I still think I am right, however, though I beg to congratulate the honourable member who explained the Government's position. It is clear that the Government is quite right, too. I beg to congratulate the Government. The Government will hear nothing more of this from me."

One concrete example must be given of the attitude of these nominated representatives of the people.

From the time that the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture started its work in Trinidad there were well-founded complaints of discrimination against coloured men. When, in April 1930, there came up before the Legislative Council a grant to the Imperial College of £8,500 a year for five years, Captain Cipriani asked the Government for a definite assurance that there would be no discrimination. If not, he would oppose the vote. Here for once the underlying reef was showing above the surface, plain, stark, and not to be denied.

The debate continued.

MR. O'REILLY (who had had a brother there): "... I do not follow my honourable friend in suggesting that there has been any discrimination at the College. . . ."

SIR HENRY ALCAZAR: "... I do not propose to address you on the question of discrimination. . . ."

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY (reading a statement from the Principal of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture): "I am at a loss to know how the idea has occurred that there is a differentiation over coloured students. . . ."

DR. MCSHINE: "Your Excellency, I also supported the desire to have some assurance from the College that the discrimination did not exist or that it was exaggerated, and I am glad to have the explanation, the statement of fact that it is not so. . . ."

MR. KESSELL: "I think that we ought in looking at this subject, to take a long view. . . . But I have the utmost confidence in the Head of the College—Mr. Evans—a

broad-minded Englishman of the right sort . . . and I do not believe there is at present any ground for complaint in regard to discrimination among the students. . . .”

MR. WORTLEY (the Director of Agriculture): “I do feel strongly that the reason is not that the College does not wish them, but that for one reason or another the Trinidadians do not wish to go to the College. In other words, other professions and other openings attract them more. . . .”

It remained for the Governor to conclude in the same strain :

“ . . . We cannot dictate to private companies what appointments they should make, but it appears to me to be very foolish if Companies operating in the country do not appoint people that live there, and prefer to go elsewhere to fill appointments. If I can help in this matter I shall certainly do so.” (Applause.)

So far the public debate. But what were the actual facts? Mr. Gaston Johnston (a coloured man), who was present, did not say anything in the House, but when the meeting was over he told Captain Cipriani that Father English, the Principal of St. Mary’s College, had received a letter from Mr. Martin Leake, the previous Principal of the Agricultural College, in which Mr. Leake had asked Father English to discourage young men of colour from coming to the Imperial College, because although he, the Principal, had nothing against them, the white students made it unpleasant, which caused a great deal of difficulty.

“My God, Johnston, you mean to say you knew that and not only did not say so yourself, but did not tell me?”

“No, for if I had told you, you would say it and cause a lot of trouble.”

Captain Cipriani knew, as every other member of Council knew, the true state of affairs at the College. When he went to England in the July following, he brought the matter to the notice of the Colonial Office.

The Colonial Office official listened to him and then took up a copy of *Hansard*.

"Captain Cipriani, you complain of discrimination. Now, isn't Mr. O'Reilly a coloured man? Yes. Now listen to what he says. . . . Isn't Sir Henry Alcazar a coloured man? Now listen to what he says. . . . Isn't Mr. Kelshall a coloured man? . . . Isn't Dr. McShine a coloured man? And this is what he says. . . . Now, Captain Cipriani, what have you come here making trouble about?"

Now one can understand the position of the white men who spoke in this debate. One can understand Mr. Wortley feeling so strongly that Trinidadians did not go to the Imperial College because they preferred other avenues, for it is an important part of the business of the Government official to deprecate any suggestion of colour discrimination, and, whenever the opportunity arises, to throw as much dust as possible. The same motives obviously actuated the Governor. How else is it possible to account for his apparent ignorance of the fact that the Oil Companies would as soon appoint a Zulu chief to some of their higher offices as a local man of colour, whatever the qualifications he had gained at the Imperial College? We can even pass over the irreconcilable conflict of evidence between Mr. Evans and his immediate predecessor. Englishmen or white men stand to gain nothing by talk about race discrimination; and on a short-sighted view they stand to lose a great deal. But in this debate, as in every other, what is so pitiful is the attitude of these so-called representatives of the people, who so often hold the positions that they do hold because of their colour. The majority of them hate even more than white men any talk about colour. For if they stand up against colour discrimination they will be noted by the Government as leaders of the people, and then good-bye to some of their dearest hopes; while for some it will mean facing in public the perfectly obvious but nevertheless dreadful fact that they are not white men.

That is the Trinidad Legislature. There is no room nor

should there be need to go any farther into details of the course of legislation.

The reader may want to know more of that pitiful remnant, the elected members, who form usually about a third of the various Legislatures. The usual colour prejudices often divide them; and in any case it takes a man of the courage and strength of Captain Cipriani to hurl himself continuously against the solid phalanx arrayed against him. But the real hopelessness of the situation is best to be seen in Grenada and Dominica. In each of these smaller Islands, where the population is more homogeneous and more closely-knit, the local Government has achieved the astonishing feat of uniting both nominated and elected members against itself. In Grenada, both these groups, defeated by the official majority, retired from the Council. Warmly supported by the whole population they have returned, but certainly not to shed tears of happy reunion on the shoulders of the Government. In Dominica all the unofficials, nominated and elected, have refused to go back and though writs have been issued for a new election no one will stand. When, after a time, one man accepted nomination by the Government the people burnt his house down. It is in this way that Empires prod their citizens into violence and sow the seeds of their own dissolution. Yet though the writing on the wall stretch from Burma to Cyprus, there are those who will not read.

When will British administrators learn the lesson and for the sake of future cordial relations give willingly and cheerfully what they know they will have to give at last? How do they serve their posterity by leaving them a heritage of bitterness and hate in every quarter of the globe? Solution of the problem there is but one—a constitution on democratic lines. This does not necessarily mean a form of government modelled plastically on the English or Dominion systems. Ceylon shows one way, Malta another. The West Indian legislators have their constitution ready. That is not a matter for debate here.

But there will only be ~~re~~ in each colony the final decisions on policy and action rest with the elected representatives of the people. Hard things are being said to-day about parliamentary democracy, but the West Indian Colonies will not presume to reject it until England and the Dominions show the n the way. The high qualification for membership of the Council must go. The high franchise for the power to vote must go. That tight-rope dancer, the nominated member, must vanish forever, and the representatives of the people thrown back upon the people.

No one expects that these Islands will, on assuming responsibility for themselves, immediately shed racial prejudice and economic depression. No one expects that by a change of constitutions the constitution of politicians will be changed. But though they will, when the occasions arise, disappoint the people, and deceive the people and even, in so-called crises, betray the people, yet there is one thing they will never be able to do—and that is, neglect the people. As long as society is constituted as it is at present that is the best that modern wage-slaves can ever hope to achieve.

For a community such as ours, where, although there is race prejudice, there is no race antagonism, where the people have reached their present level in wealth, education, and general culture, the Crown Colony system of government has no place. It was useful in its day, but that day is now over. It is a fraud, because it is based on assumptions of superiority which have no foundation in fact. Admirable as are their gifts in this direction, yet administrative capacity is not the monopoly of the English; and even if it were, charity begins at home, especially in these difficult times. The system is wicked, because to an extent far more than is immediately obvious it permits a privileged few to work their will on hundreds of thousands of defenceless people. But most of all is the system criminal because it uses England's overflow as a cork to choke down the natural expansion of the people. Always the West Indian of any ambition or sensibility



has to see positions of honour and power in his own country filled by itinerant demi-gods who sit at their desks, ears cocked for the happy news of a retirement in Nigeria or a death in Hong-Kong; when they go and others of the same kind take their places, while men often better than they stand outside, rejected and despised. And even were the Colonial Office officials ideally suited to their posts the situation would not be better, but worse than it is. For the more efficient they are, the more do they act as a blight upon those vigorous and able men whose home is their island, and who, in the natural course of events, would rise to power and influence. Governors and governed stand on either side of a gulf which no tinkering will bridge, and political energy is diverted into other channels or simply runs to waste. Britain will hold us down as long as she wishes. Her cruisers and aeroplanes ensure it. But a people like ours should be free to make its own failures and successes, free to gain that political wisdom and political experience which come only from the practice of political affairs. Otherwise, led as we are by a string, we remain without credit abroad and without self-respect at home, a bastard, feckless conglomeration of individuals, inspired by no common purpose, moving to no common end.

"Self-government when fit for it."

That has always been the promise. Britain can well afford to keep it in this case, where evidence in favour is so overwhelming and she loses so little by keeping her word.